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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#)
SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM BLOSSOMS IN
KUWAIT'S ORANGE MOVEMENT

REF: A. KUWAIT 1744
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 1642

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary and comment: Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Kuwait's recent "orange revolution" is the role played by the ad hoc coalition of pro-reform youth organizations known as the "orange movement." These youth organizations, which include both liberals and Islamists and were not previously united, coalesced spontaneously around the issue of electoral reform. Though they operated independently, these diverse groups coordinated with each other through pro-reform websites/blogs and SMS and succeeded in generating a groundswell of popular support for electoral reform, ultimately driving members of Parliament's insistence on five constituencies. It remains to be seen if these diverse groups can translate their successful pro-reform, anti-corruption campaign to the June 29 parliamentary elections without the movement splitting over the groups' support for different candidates. Many of those involved in the orange movement are already lobbying candidates to adopt political reform as their central campaign issue and are targeting corrupt candidates. According to one activist, their ultimate goal is to see a less corrupt, more reform-minded Parliament elected. Although this pro-reform youth movement is just one of many interest groups lobbying candidates to support their vision of Kuwait's future, its members have demonstrated the potential for grassroots political activism in Kuwait, and contributed instrumentally to a growing awareness of corruption and interest in political reform among the broader Kuwaiti public. End summary and comment.

Peeling the Orange Movement

[1](#)2. (C/NF) The "orange movement" is a loose coalition of diverse pro-reform youth organizations and individuals that have united in support of a common goal: reducing the number of electoral constituencies from 25 to five in order to combat corruption in Kuwait. These groups span Kuwait's political spectrum, including both liberals and Islamists, though they are not supported directly by any of Kuwait's main political blocs. (Comment: The majority of these organizations are not officially recognized NGOs, of which there are only 76 in Kuwait; rather, they are informal organizations grouping like-minded persons/friends who support a particular cause or issue. End comment.) The movement came together spontaneously, sparked by pro-reform blogs and websites and organized through SMS. Since the movement relied primarily on electronic communication, many of those supporting the movement still do not know who organized the rallies or which other groups/individuals were involved. Though they cooperated in a loose sense, each

organization operated independently, printing its own materials and rallying its own supporters. As momentum grew, more and more people attended the rallies and/or read the pro-reform websites, contributing to greater public awareness of the issue and increased pressure on the Government and Parliament to implement electoral reform legislation. With Parliament dissolved, the challenge for these organizations will be maintaining momentum and cohesion in their pro-reform, anti-corruption campaign.

Orange for Reform

13. (C/NF) According to Dana Al-Salem, a liberal Kuwaiti in her late-twenties, the orange movement started in mid-April when three liberal youth organizations - the Kuwait Youth Organization, Vote 2007, and Student Strength (Quwa Al-Tulabiya) - organized a meeting of 39 local youth organizations to support electoral reform as a means of reducing political corruption in Kuwait. (Bio note: Dana studied Political Science at Trinity University in Washington, DC and helped found Vote 2007, an organization dedicated to getting out the vote. She also serves as the Vice President of the Kuwait Youth Organization and a Board member of the National Democratic Alliance, a liberal political association. End note.) The 39 organizations, which included the influential National Union of Kuwait Students (NUKS) and its affiliate, the Kuwait University Student Union, agreed to contribute 100 KD (\$346) each to place an ad in three local newspapers saying simply, "We Want Five."

14. (C/NF) The ad received considerable attention and helped increase support for electoral reform, Dana said. To

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capitalize on their success, the youth organizations, led by the Kuwait Youth Organization, Vote 2007, and Student Strength, organized a series of rallies in support of five constituencies. Dana believed these rallies, particularly the overnight rally held prior to the key May 15 parliamentary debate on the issue, were crucial to galvanizing public support and pressuring pro-reform parliamentarians (MPs) to insist on five constituencies rather compromise with the Government on a ten constituency proposal. It was this ad hoc coalition of youth organizations that ultimately drove the MPs' confrontation with the Government over electoral reform, rather than the movement being a tool the MPs used to pressure the Government, as some observers initially suggested.

15. (C/NF) According to Dana, fractures in the movement began to emerge when the Islamist-dominated NUKS tried to take credit for and leadership of later rallies. They succeeded to some degree, requiring the segregation of males and females and reading Qu'ranic verses over the loudspeakers, though most liberal organizations were willing to temporarily ignore these actions in the interest of maintaining the movement's momentum. After the Amir constitutionally dissolved Parliament on May 21, the groups struggled to maintain their unity and momentum. It remains to be seen if they can translate their successful pro-reform, anti-corruption campaign to the elections without the movement splitting over the various groups' support for different candidates.

Phase II: "Paint the District Orange"

16. (C/NF) Dana told Poloff that one segment of the orange movement with which she is heavily involved was planning to launch "Phase II" of the movement on June 7. This second phase will target corrupt candidates in five districts. During four-day campaigns in each district, pro-reformers aim to "paint the district orange" in an effort to demonstrate popular support for reform and highlight problems of

corruption. To this end, they have prepared packages, which include orange t-shirts, flags, and bumper stickers, to give to supporters of reform in each district. Each campaign will culminate in a major pro-reform rally in that district. The group also plans to hold one final rally in front of Parliament on June 28, the evening before the elections. Dana said the group hoped to raise 37,000 KD (\$128,000) from sympathetic individuals to support their campaign, and reported that they had already raised more than a third of that amount in just three days. Dana explained that they were not supporting any one candidate, rather they wanted to demonstrate their support for pro-reform candidates and opposition to corrupt candidates. The ultimate goal, she said, was to get a less corrupt, more reform-minded Parliament elected, which would then reduce the number of electoral constituencies and pass other important political reforms.

17. (C/NF) Others from the orange movement have adopted different strategies and some openly support particular candidates. Mohammed Al-Boushehri, a liberal Shi'a who participated in the orange movement, told Poloff he and a number of others involved in the movement had agreed to support Adnan Abdel Samad, a Shi'a candidate affiliated with the National Islamic Alliance (NIA), a highly conservative, pro-Iran Shi'a political association. Al-Boushehri explained that although he disagreed with Samad's ideological leanings, he would support him because Samad was both pro-reform and strong enough to stand up to the Government. (Bio note: Al-Boushehri is a member of the National Democratic Alliance and the Kuwait Democratic Forum, both liberal political associations. He helped found the Dialogue Center (www.kwtanweer.com), a group devoted to facilitating communication between different segments of Kuwaiti society. Al-Boushehri received a degree in industrial engineering from a university in Dayton, Ohio. End note.)

Cyber Activism

18. (S/NF) The three main websites/blogs devoted to the pro-reform goals of the orange movement are: www.alommmah.org, www.kuwaitjunior.blogspot.com, and www.kuwait5.org. (Note: All three websites are in Arabic. End note.) Bashar Al-Sayegh, who operates [alommmah.com](http://www.alommmah.com), told Poloff he did not know who ran [kuwaitjunior](http://www.kuwaitjunior.com) and its subsidiary website, [kuwait5](http://www.kuwait5.org), though he communicated with them through email. He reported that hits on his site grew steadily since the beginning of the year and skyrocketed during the electoral

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reform debate, reaching 200,000 hits in April and even more in May. (Note: Kuwait has approximately one million citizens of whom 340,000 are registered to vote. End note.) Asked his motivation for promoting political reform, Al-Sayegh, who works for an Internet company, said he had always been interested in politics and wanted to "change the country's negative trends (i.e. corruption)." He expressed hope that the next Parliament would again walk out if the Government refused to adopt five constituencies. Al-Sayegh was hard-pressed, though, to explain why the movement met with so much popular support. "We had no idea this would happen," he said.

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